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Thirteenth Meeting of the Latin Club

CHANGE OF PLACE

The thirteenth regular meeting of The New York Latin Club is called for Saturday, December 3, at 12 M, in the Hotel St Denis, corner of Broadway and Eleventh Street, New York. Professor John C. Rolfe of the University of Pennsylvania, will address the club. The subject will be announced later. All persons who are interested, whether teachers of Latin or not, are cordially invited to be present. The plan is to serve luncheon at 12 M, promptly, so that there shall be no delay. The address will follow the luncheon, and adjournment will occur about 2 P M, thus leaving the afternoon still unbroken, for those who attend. Please send a postal card at once to the Sec'y, Mr A L Hodges, 309 W 101 st, N Y, if you intend to be present, so that we may inform Mr Taylor, the proprietor of the hotel, how many to expect. *Please attend to this at once.*

The price of the luncheon will be 75 cents to members, \$1.00 to others. A ticket entitling a member to the three luncheons of the year can be secured of the Secretary in advance for \$2.00.

Out-of-town teachers may find it convenient to be in the city on the day announced.

Information as to the conditions of membership in The Latin Club can be had at this meeting, or by referring to Nos 3 and 10 of THE LATIN LEAFLET, or by addressing the Secretary

H H BICE, *President*
A L HODGES, *Secretary*

Lucretius and Vergil

IN TWO PARTS—PART I.

Vergil's religion is curiously illustrated by that of Lucretius. Their opinions "on man, on nature, and on human life", most unlike in

kind and content, show nevertheless a certain likeness in the strange manner in which they are held—in the precarious conditions of their tenure. For Lucretius and Vergil are, each of them, possessed of a permanent feeling, which, again and again, in each its opposite temporarily but strongly displaces.

Lucretius, a citizen of late republican Rome, beholds in the world the image of his country's polity,—a complex of law-abiding atoms, governed not by some central personal power of godhead above, but by a spontaneous rule (II 1090 sqq) born as it were from the inner necessity of nature. The universe, for him, is determined,—self-determined: learn, then, the Nature of Things, and you shall know what you have to expect (III 1071 sqq). Be it good or bad, at least it is not arbitrary, or subject to the caprice of gods made in the image of weak-kneed men. If good, so much gain; if bad, no disappointment; and he who sits calmly and unambitiously within the impregnable stronghold of his soul has nothing to fear. Lucretius's answer to the riddle of the Sphinx is plain: Epicurean law in the outer world, Stoical endurance in the inner:—an answer which, enthroning the ancient Roman fortitude upon a Greek tragical conviction of uniformity in nature, embodies his classical, his permanent feeling.

But the solid specious edifice of this cosmology sometimes rocks as with tempest or secret earthquake; its foundations tremble as if undermined by an enemy; and Lucretius, posing even to himself as a thorough materialist, interested strictly in a machinery of atoms, now and again discloses in a shudder his doubt and vague foreboding of what may lie "beyond the flaming ramparts of the world" (I 73).

The gods, for instance,—are they really just agreeable figure-heads, placidly sunning themselves above the jar and turmoil of nature (II 1904 sqq, III 18), and, like the philosopher himself (II 7), looking down unperturbed upon human vanity? What if these disinter-

ested spectators should be taking a hand in the game? What if their power should turn out to be measureless as of old, and their ways capricious and incalculable (. . . *cura illa . . . Ne quae forte deum nobis immensa potestas Sit vario motu quae candida sidera verset*; V 1209. The whole passage—V 1204—1240—is striking evidence that Lucretius felt the fearsomeness of nature, and her mystery, quite as strongly as her reason.)?

"Is there a law, and is it against me?"—so we may figure to ourselves his thought—"Well, I will meet it resolutely, possessing my soul. But who is strong against caprice,—against a personal power breaking arbitrarily the chain of causation,—against chance, that saps the fortress-walls from within"?

Mere Law, then, and Fortitude, do not sum up Lucretius's whole view of life. Law, to be sure, but Law potentially broken by Chance; Fortitude, indeed, but Fortitude unseated ever and anon by mystery and chill fear. These intervals, in Lucretius,—let us boldly call them romantic,—gather to themselves much of his greatest poetry and most splendid and terrible diction. The well-known passage on Death, for instance, perhaps the noblest in Lucretius (III 830-end), in precept must be credited to the Stoical side of the account; but which more touches the reader there, the rationalism of the argument against fear of death, or the pathos and inevitableness of death itself? Which, the argument or the thing argued against, is the more "eloquent, just and mighty"? As De Quincey says of a celebrated sentence of the Hydriontaphia: "Where shall one hope to find music so Miltonic, an intonation of such solemn chords? What a melodious ascent, as of a prelude to some impassioned requiem breathing from the pomps of earth, and from the sanctities of the grave!"

Everywhere, indeed, the mystery and immediate awe is more feelingly rendered by Lucretius than their rational explanation. The one appeals to his intellect, the other to his primitive emotions. Witness his awe-struck epithets for those very objects in nature that he would fain believe he has mastered. The stars especially fire his imagination: "*palantia sidera*" he calls them, "*candida sidera*", "*aetheris ignes*", "*noctivagaeque faces coeli flammaeque volantes*", "*labentia signa*", "*splendida signa*". Errant stars, glowing stars, ethereal fires; soaring flames and night-wandering torches of heaven, as if obeying an impulse of their own, spontaneous and oc-

cult, or lighting some celestial being upon his way through the night; the shining marks of time and the seasons, and bright portents of things to come. The ether feeds them—"aether sidera pascit"—that they may remain the incorruptible stars: sublime conception, paralleled by Wadsworth:

"Thou doest preserve the stars from wrong,

And the most ancient heavens, through thee, are fresh and strong".

(Ode to Duty)

Lucretius again, in what may be called his version of the Law of Diminishing Return, displays a sense of the age and weariness of the world (*omnia paulatim tabescere and ire Ad capulum, spatio aetatis defessa vetusto*; II 1173)—a real *Weltschmerz*—not unlike that of Sidney's lines to the Moon:

"With how sad steps, O Moone, thou clim'st the skies!

How silently, and with how sad a face"! , or Shelley's:

"Art thou pale for weariness

Of climbing heaven, and gazing on earth"? Even within the cold borders of his scientific domain, the poet, contemplating the breath and sweep of his emprise, is sometimes rapt into passion. And at such times he feels no classic sense of power and conquest, but rather "His ibi me rebus quaedam divina voluptas Percipit atque horror" (III 28), a kind of shivering rapture, as at a ghost story.

That in Lucretius there ebbs and flows an intermittent current of romance, often unseen, sometimes corroding secretly the foundations of his system, and at other times gushing strongly and visibly up like an irregular geyser, seems to me beyond doubt.

M Patin (*Études sur la poésie Latine*, Paris, 1883, vol 1, ch 7: *L'Anti-Lucrèce chez Lucrèce*), with another aim in view, reaches similar conclusions. He finds in the *De Rerum Natura* passages implicitly admitting, though explicitly denying, Providence, Free Will, the Spirituality and Immortality of the Soul, etc. And this precisely through the warmth, color and feeling Lucretius displays in setting forth the doctrines he denies. "N'accusons pas légèrement Lucrèce d'inconséquence, mais reconnaissons que, par certaines expressions, dont il ne mesure pas toute la portée possible, il lui arrive d'éveiller dans notre esprit des idées contraires aux doctrines qu'il enseigne, et, leur prêtant involontairement les formes merveilleuses de sa poésie, de

nous en pénétrer, de nous en persuader davantage" (p 121).

Of the passage I have cited from Bk V 1204-1240, M Patin says: "Est ce la pensée de Lucrèce que rendent ces derniers vers? N'est ce pas plutôt celle de ses adversaires? Je le crois; mais je crois aussi qu'ils peuvent en accepter, en réclamer, comme un argument pour leur cause, l'énergique expression" (p 123).

SAMUEL WOLFF

DeWitt Cinton H S

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